

## **No Remedy for Memory by dancewithink**

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**Summary:** A runaways fic set in the City of Angels. Part 2 of the First Love/ Late Spring fic series. At 23, Mike Wheeler is going for broke. Having quit college on his sophomore year, he traded the diploma for the dream. At 18, Jane "Eleven" Hopper is ready to leave her entire life behind. She took a bus ride from Sacramento to Los Angeles on a hot day. The chorus of the cicadas

## No Remedy for Memory

**Note:** Hope you like my version of Runaway!El inspired by Lana del Rey's Pawn Shop Blues and Dark Paradise.

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You haven't slept a wink in three days. You spend all your free time looking for her. It's pointless but the alternative is trying to accept the fact that she has left. You've always been insecure, afraid that your love for her far exceeds the affection that she held for you. At the moment, you are way past that insecurity. You are desperate and grieving.

You know that she is capable but you worry all the same. She bruises easily. She's always feeling cold. You have a list of the small gestures you loved to do for her. The same list knots up your insides because it is a reminder that you are nobody with nothing else to offer.

You see her short chestnut curls everywhere but her eyes only appear in your dreams. She left her chapstick and a pair of socks in your apartment. They accompany you in your vigil but they are indifferent to your tears.

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At 23, Mike Wheeler is going for broke. Having quit college on his sophomore year, he traded the diploma for the dream. Trying his luck in California meant that he was busboy by day and clerk at the gas station convenience store at night. His trade was storytelling and he wanted to learn about people firsthand. He left his family believing that independence would help him discard the traces of his growing up in the isolation of suburbia. Now he feels foolish and forlorn.

Writing scripts for television, film, and plays wasn't paying off. Nobody was taking a bite of what he had whipped up. He was getting tired of playing his own music to crowds more interested in covers. Sometimes his songs were bland and generic. Other times they were too intellectual and disproportionately ambiguous. Mostly he just feels that he's starting to lose heart.

Then, it happened. He just finished cleaning a big mess a couple of high school kids left when she came in. Hers was a face of summertime in spring. She walked past him and settled on one of the booths on his side of the diner. She had the soft look that only youth can offer and the provocative aura of a girl in full control. She had on a simple tank top and a short jean skirt with her worn white sneakers. Mike suddenly felt ancient as he cleared her table. By the time the girl left, he had aged by a thousand years.

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The first few hours felt like a misstep. By nightfall, you had already got a hang of your emotions. He would have already found your short letter, hastily written but carefully thought of. You love him but you don't want to lose yourself in him. Your decision was one of prejudice but mostly pride.

Eighteen is too young for commitment. Devotion reminded you too much of deities and your dad. You didn't leave one man just to fall into the arms of another. Your execution might have been poor but a mistake it was not.

You have the smile of a girl who's lived a charmed life. You use it now to its full potential, hoping to catch the eye of someone with cash to spare. Instead, what you get is a free refill from the mousy woman in charge of the counter. You thank her silently even though you've already had enough. Anyway, it's easier to blame the nerves on caffeine than cast self-doubt.

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At 18, Jane "Eleven" Hopper is ready to leave her entire life behind. She took a bus ride from Sacramento to Los Angeles on a hot day. The chorus of the cicadas sounded off like a farewell hymn. The bus ride was long enough that she had imagined the million ways in which her father must have reacted upon reading her note. Each one tore at her heart but she was used to heartache.

Upon arrival, she met up with a friend she went to camp with who agreed to let her sleep on a couch for her first two weeks. She taught herself to be satisfied with a diet that consisted solely of bread. She convinced herself that it was fine getting woken up in the middle of the night by the parrot and the phone sex in the bedroom. Getting a

job proved to be hard so the other girl asked if she wanted to land an operator gig too. She tried but the words tasted like acid in her mouth. She was willing to do whatever it took to be an actress, but there were games of pretend that she promised herself she wasn't going to play.

Then, it happened. She finally got a job as a food service attendant and decided to splurge on diner pancakes and strawberry milkshake. The boy who cleared her table was lanky with a face dotted with freckles. On any other day, she wouldn't have noticed him but that afternoon had her wearing rose tinted glasses and yearning for sweet things. He looked unkempt in a city where everything was made to look perfect. The wobbly smile he gave before he walked off away was charming. She felt that leaving a napkin with her number on it was a big mistake but she did it anyway.

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On a path to acceptance, you now feel the anger threatening to consume you. You understand ambition but wonder how she could choose it over you. The feeling is transmuted into your writing and you are disgusted with the Fitzgerald that she had turned you into. You regret giving her half of yourself. Tinseltown isn't a place for a half-empty man.

*As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances.* You had great belief in poets and relied on your own loose interpretations for advice. So you tell yourself that Whitman wanted you to go drinking with a co-worker to drown all your sorrows and air out your woes. In the morning you drudge through work with a massive hangover and the aftertaste of the heady incantation that lurked behind the act of talking about her.

During your break, you smoke through half your pack of Camels. It was part of a string of bad habits that you had taken up to spite your negligent father. You think that maybe it's time to quit. Filtered memories could only do so much.

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On the third date, Mike had blurted out an invitation for El to come live with him. Her roommate had gotten a new boyfriend who eyed El half the time. It scared El while making the other girl catty and

jealous. It didn't take much convincing for her to accept the offer. After a nightcap, they got her stuff from the cramped trailer and scurried back to his place. Placing her things next to his made the apartment look like an upturned smile.

They fell into a shared domestic routine. Mike cooked them breakfast since El needed coffee before being able to function in the morning. She cleaned the dishes and swept the floor before heading out for her afternoon shift. He was in charge of getting the laundry done. Mostly, they liked doing things together.

A particularly bad night for Mike started a thing that they did to cheer each other up. El found him sobbing in the bedroom with a bruise below his eye. He didn't want to admit that his boss had hit him. Instead of pushing him to talk, she started telling him things she had never told anyone. I was fourteen when I first asked to be called Eleven. My first kiss was with my bestfriend, Lucas. A year before my mama died, she had already stopped recognizing any of us.

She stopped just as abruptly as she started. He knew that he wasn't to bring any of it up just as he knew he wasn't allowed to interrupt. The soft kiss that she planted on his lips felt like a reward for passing a secret test. He wished that the gesture sealed a promise that she would stay.

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You get tired of living with a friend from work in her old sedan. The pay you get now is significantly less than what you were getting from last job you were forced to quit. You think it was a smart move that got you out of his radar. Still, you can't help but miss the comforts of a home. It is disheartening to take your baths in a gym. The fact that you have to worry about being run off starts eating you up. You used to love rainy days. You used to love a lot of things.

The trip to the pawn shop took you forever. You didn't get attached to pretty things so this should be an easy trade-off to get yourself off the streets. But letting go of the gold metal flower earrings that Mike gave you felt like a nosedive. You almost cried as you handed them off. This was a betrayal far worse than humiliation. However private this declaration was, it made you feel naked in your pursuit of higher consciousness. You knew that you could surrender it all if you were

able to relinquish your heart. You wonder how it didn't hit you until now.

You are convinced that such were the sacrifices of being alone. Mr. Photographer's stride reminded you of how Mike walked up to you when you went dancing together. Mr. Producer's belly laugh contrasted wonderfully with the breathless cackle that accompanied Mike's offbeat humor. When Mr. Agent asked to take pictures, it made you think of your first night with Mike. If musicians peddled their instruments when the going got tough, so could you.

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Never before had El studied anybody's intricacies as fiercely as she did with Mike's. It thrilled and horrified her at the same time. Every morning she would look at herself in the mirror and watch as little bits and pieces of him appeared in her reflection. Sometimes she would catch herself being untrue, saying things she didn't mean but matched his words. Self-chastising would follow a performance of mental acrobatics to get a glimpse of his smile.

"I get distracted by you a lot," she whispered at the crook of his neck. The hammering of her heart mimicked the crash of the waves on the coast of Santa Monica Bay. The magnanimity of what she said was cushioned by the plethora of sounds at the pier. She craned her neck to check if he had intuited what she had meant by it. A Caravaggio angel in a billowy blue shirt looked back at her with an unreadable expression. Even the California sun couldn't cast light on the mystery encased in his shrouded eyes.

His sisters come for an unexpected visit one weekend. You watch as Nancy silently inspected the shared apartment while both of you pretend not to hear the argument between fifteen year old Holly and her estranged brother in the bedroom. "So it's pretty serious between you two," the older girl both stated an observation while posing a question. El answered the measuring stare with apologetic eyes. "Did you know that serious is said to be related to the Old English swær meaning heavy or sad?" was her reply.

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**Five years later**

In an Oscars after party, Mike saw her enter the red carpet. The modern day Hepburn basking in spotlight had him in awe. Her recent performance had put her in the ranks of women such as Saoirse Ronan and Rooney Mara. The first time nominee for Best Supporting Actress was accompanied by her father. In recent interviews, she had revealed how she had also been a victim of sexual predators in Hollywood during her first year in the business. A fierce human rights advocate, she has become a role model. Seeing her flourish into a truly formidable woman had him thanking the stars that she outgrew him so quickly.

El trembled at the sight of him. He was chatting with Noah Baumbach and even though she couldn't hear him, she knew that he was in his element. She had watched all of his movies and had imagined hearing the dazzlingly witty lines in his voice. During a touching scene in his latest film, a David Byrne reworking of a song he composed for her years ago played in the background. Knowing that he's currently working with Michael Moore on a documentary about indigenous people made her proud. Watching him receive praises across the room, she thinks that perhaps leaving him was really for the best.

At the men's room, Mike came face to face with Jim Hopper. He was intimidating even when he was giving a paternal smile. The gruff man recognized him and asked that he greet his daughter before they leave. With a last knowing glance, he left the dumbstruck screenwriter who was on the verge of weeping in joy.

It was a surreal moment for El when she turned around to see who had tapped her shoulder. The vulnerable look he had on his face unsteadied her. She felt guilty for making him suspect that she would be anything but elated. Her fingers automatically reached for his face, a subconscious requisition of respite. Her blood singed at the touch. His name was a prayer on her lips. *Mike. Mike.*

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At 28, Mike Wheeler is going to get married. Having a second chance with the love of your life was the stuff of movies. When he tried his luck in California, he knew he could prosper adjacent to real characters but never dreamed that he too could live a story worth telling. Him and El left home believing that family was a hindrance

only to realize that growing up meant going back. Now he feels loved and lighter than ever.

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At 25, Jane "El Ives" Hopper-Wheeler is ready to be a mother. She has decided to take a leap of faith. It was time to bid farewell to the chorus of her fears. She had pondered long enough whether she was fit to be a parent and had too often imagined the million ways in which she could fail at it. She knew that love didn't come without heartache. With Mike around, she is reminded that the gamble is well worth it.

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### **End Notes:**

The homeless count for L.A. is alarming. If folks at a renowned first world city experience state abandonment to that extent, how can some people still believe that late capitalism is sustainable?

Anybody else frustrated with the fact that Hopper-Wheeler doesn't sound so good together? How the heck does Wheeler-Byers-Harrington sound better than that? I feel bamboozled.